**Nile Basin Development Challenge**

**Template for the most significant change story 2012**

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| **Project** | **NBDC – N2 Local Innovation Platforms** |
| **Title** | **Local innovation funds as a spur to integrated action on rainwater management** |
| **Author(s)** | **Zelalem Lema, Josie Tucker, Aberra Adie, Beth Cullen and Alan Duncan** |
| **Domain** |  |
| **Story** | This story follows the activities of the woreda level Innovation Platforms (IPs), and shows that the provision of small seed funds, managed by the platforms themselves, is spurring more integrated and locally-tailored action on rainwater management. Baseline research conducted in the three NBDC woredas (Diga, Fogera and Jeldu) indicated that rainwater management planning suffers from a somewhat rigid, top-down approach with limited participation of farmers, little flexibility for action to be adapted to context, and a tendency for sector offices to work under separate plans. This is in spite of the fact that rainwater management cuts across water resource management, crop and livestock management and environmental protection. The Innovation Platforms established in the three sites aimed to overcome these challenges, by creating an opportunity to explore new ways of working which are integrated, participatory and driven by local needs.  In April 2012, a small Innovation Fund (IF) was set up, providing small amounts of money to the IPs on the basis of bottom-up proposals from the platforms for integrated rainwater management pilots. Although challenges remain, it appears that the fund is succeeding in stimulating interest in new ways of working, and a much greater attention to documenting local experiences for learning. For new institutional approaches to resource management to take hold requires long term shifts in the knowledge, attitudes and skills of various stakeholders; involving communities from the beginning of project design, documenting lessons and scaling out successes from the bottom-up are not standard practice. However, pilots supported by the IF are providing an opportunity for local stakeholders to test the value of these approaches, and there are some promising signs of change.  Each platform has designed a pilot programme aimed at tackling soil erosion and land degradation problems and simultaneously increasing productivity. In a series of meetings, initially facilitated by ILRI but with increasing handover of elements to locally identified NGO facilitators, IP members identified critical local challenges and designed joint actions. IPs include a range of stakeholders from government, NGOs and the research community, and their purpose is to strengthen coordination among different actors and initiate shared learning around rainwater management, with the ultimate goal of improving the livelihoods of farmers.  In all three sites the IPs chose to introduce improved fodder management practices, with the twin aim of ameliorating livestock feed shortages and reducing soil erosion. Technical Groups have taken forward implementation of the pilots through a joint planning process including site selection, awareness creation, socio-economic data collection, training for farmers’ group on land preparation and planting, input supply and technical support on land preparation and planting, organization of field days, and regular meetings to identify refinements needed to the strategy and consider prospects for scaling out.  A notable aspect of the projects is that a learning approach has been taken from the start. New fodder trees and grasses are being tested on a range of land types including communal grazing land, private lands, backyards and on soil and water conservation structures (conservation campaigns are on-going in the sites, and synergies are being sought), in order to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each strategy. Stakeholders have come together frequently to take joint decisions on every step of the implementation.  Although it is early days, the farmers involved in the pilots report that they have seen promising results and are eager to continue the interventions next season. Farmers have a vision of minimizing free grazing, changing their local breeds to cross breeds for generating more income from milk production and/or fattening, using the grasses and trees to reduce soil erosion and even generating income by developing nurseries to sell seeds from improved fodder species. The IP members seem to be motivated by the interest of farmers, and have expressed a wish to professionalise and systematise their support to farmers on these issues. The University and Research Centers which are members of IPs are also looking to adopt the sites as model areas for integrated rainwater management, to maximise learning.  The following story of events in Fogera illustrates the changes occurring in one site, and is also documented visually in the accompanying photo story.  *In Fogera, farmers are fencing what used to be communal free grazing land for the development of fodder trees and grasses, and are also planting on their back yards. Although the intervention started late after the rains, the farmers have seen both grasses and trees take hold. An expert from Andasa Research Centre is working with the woreda livestock agency to provide technical support and advise farmers on feeding and use of the new fodder plants. The experts visit the pilot sites to provide advice, and have also invited farmers to visit livestock research centres where they are encouraged to consider new breeds of cattle which would enable them to diversify into milk production or fattening. The Research Centre will incorporate the field sites into its on-going research programmes, offering a good chance that lessons are learned and successes can be scaled up.*  *A field day has also been held during which neighbouring farmers visited the sites, and may have subsequently expressed interest in adopting the new fodder species. The IP technical group has promised to provide inputs and support farmers’ planning, to enable more integrated resource management approaches at landscape level. So far, the farmers and IP members have identified a nursery site for the next season’s multiplication of seeds.*  Detailed research on the political economy of the IPs’ activities is ongoing and is expected to generate further lessons, but our initial understanding is that IP members are increasingly seeing the value of a joint decision-making process. This is evidenced in the frequency of discussions which they have undertaken, and in the fact that the IP has now sought to institutionalise the process, sending letters to each member organisation and requesting that they assign a staff member as a regular participant. This should help overcome the challenges currently created by frequent turnover of individuals within the IPs.  Probably the main remaining gap is in establishing effective modes of interaction between the IPs and the communities themselves. ILRI has taken various steps to bring communities into the IP process, for example through the use of participatory video and training IP members in participatory planning, and there have been varying degrees of community engagement in the design of the IF projects, but there is still some way to go before communities are equal partners in the IP process. In particular, there is scope to involve a wider range of community members and ensure equity of benefits. Currently those who do not own livestock or land have not benefited, and there is a risk that some may lose out (for example some have previously collected cattle dung from free grazing areas which are no longer available). Equity issues and community participation will be the main focus of further research and support to the IPs over the next year. |
| **Lessons** | **List the lessons here**   * With little seed money IPs can design and implement joint works that will bring impact among small scale farmers, but there is a need for improved budget management systems. * IP members should be trained in action research and participatory approaches that will help the successful implementation of the pilot by building local research capacity. * Farmers trust can be built through participatory approach in the process of designing and implementing the pilot that will solve their problems. But engendering meaningful community participation in decision-making is not a simple matter of training IP members in participatory planning and requires on-going engagement and support. * Staff turnover at local level challenges the IP in terms of knowledge building and learning, and makes joint action less effective. Making institutional membership for identified appropriate professionals and experts representing their organization is vital. * IPs should be hosted under the established local organization for its future sustainability. * Establishment of Nursery sites is vital for the next season implementation of the pilot, and will enable farmers to access inputs within their local area. |
| **Describe the issues that have facilitated the success aspects of this story?**   * The Local Innovation Fund and its criteria to develop the proposal by the local IP members and for it to create joint action where the IP members are interested in working together with other professionals * The existence of range of stakeholders including university and research centre for their professional values, * Farmers high interest in taking the intervention forward through allocating their private lands, communal lands and backyard for the pilot * The pilot intervention were selected as a multi-problem solving and also its impact in the future at land scape level though it is very small watershed level but with high expectation for its scale up |
| **What has exacerbated the aspects of this story that have not gone well?**   * The timing of the fund released to the IP members through local institutions delayed the timing of planting the fodder as the TG were waiting for the money to buy inputs including seed |
| Process | **Why and how was this story selected?**  This story was selected as a promising change that will happen among the farmers who are challenged with the lots of problems on the natural resource degradation including soil erosion and land degradation. The interventions selected and being implemented by the local actors are very interesting as it solves not only the immediate problem of shortage of fodder but has a contribution to decrease soil erosion, land degradation, over grazing and termite infestation and also will generate income through different ways. These are in line with the current policy issue among government for its future scaling up and have also a big impact on the livelihood of farmers involved in the pilot. If we tell this promising story we believe that there are lots of issues to be considered in the year 2013 by NBDC team that will foster local IPs to achieve the intended on-going change. |
|  | **Future consideration and next activities**   * Capacity building for local facilitators and IP members on action research methodology and process documentation * Supporting the IPs in identifying sources of funds to extend and scale up activities. * Strengthening the participation of research centres and universities in the IP activities and maintain the joint planning to be implemented on the ground. * Initiate cross-sharing of the experiences between the three sites to help broaden their knowledge and attitude from different perspectives * Working more on linking the intervention with the existing government existing structure for creating a buy in among the institutions at woreda level for its sustainability * To ensure sustainability’s of IPs capacity building on action research approach and facilitation skill needs to be provided for members and also embed IPs in local institutions |

**Photo story of showing the process of the pilot project main activities at Fogera**

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**Awareness creation, training, land preparation, in put supply, 2nd round training, weeding …**

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**Weeding by young, backyard fodder development by women, Dr Kindu’s and Abera’s visit, field days…**

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**Field day discussions, visit by Abera and Zelalem with TG, farmers harvesting, and TG meeting**

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| **Project** | **NBDC (N2)** |
| **Title** | **Participatory video for ‘vertical communication’ of rainwater management issues between farmers and policy makers** |
| **Author(s)** | **Beth Cullen, Alan Duncan, Aberra Adie** |
| **Domain** | **Research** |
| **Story** | This Most Significant Change Story focuses on the use of Participatory Video (PV) to increase community participation in Nile Basin Development Challenge (NBDC) Innovation Platforms (IP). AnInnovation Platformis a need-based network of different stakeholders for exchanging knowledge and developing joint action. Within the context of the NBDC, platforms aim to create conditions which foster innovation capacity and thereby bring about change in livelihoods and natural resource management. Desired outcomes are changed habits and practices, improved links between stakeholders and increased capacity of communities to engage in collective action and other local agents to support them.  With these outcomes in mind, the objective of using PV was to change policy makers’ attitudes towards farmers and increase farmer participation in rainwater management activities. Rainwater management interventions in Ethiopia have historically been implemented in a top-down fashion without due regard to the needs, aspirations, constraints and livelihood realities of local farming communities. Lack of farmer awareness is also something which is regularly mentioned by higher level stakeholders. Such attitudes are not conducive to farmer participation or capacity building and hamper implementation. Community members are often not called upon to voice their opinions or take part in discussions about the policies that affect them. Instead there is a performance of ‘participation’ and as a result local realities rarely enter the decision-making process. It is hoped that greater dialogue between community members and policy makers at local level will contribute to the increased participation of communities in future processes and thereby contribute to a change in the way that rainwater management interventions are planned and implemented. This is important because it has been shown that approaches which actively involve farmers have a much greater chance of success. It is well documented that in the past farmers have destroyed the results of their work under collective schemes partly due to top-down approaches.  The change process began with a participatory video training facilitated by Beth Cullen (ILRI), Gareth Benest (InsightShare) and Aberra Adie (ILRI). The training involved a group of twelve farmers in Fogera woreda (district) in Amhara region of Ethiopia for ten days. Farmers were selected from three kebeles (neighborhoods) in different parts of the landscape (upland, midland and plains) and consisted of six men and six women of varying socio-economic backgrounds. None of them had ever used cameras before the training. Perhaps surprisingly for an area where farmers are increasingly apathetic and indifferent towards research efforts there was full attendance throughout the PV training. Community members planned and shot their own film focusing on land and water management issues which was then shown to other community members in three kebeles (neighborhoods), CGIAR researchers in Addis Ababa, and members of the Fogera innovation platform.  Some changes in attitudes have already been observed. During the training, farmers were observed using audio-visual equipment by government staff and development agents who expressed surprise at the participants’ abilities; as such the PV process seems to have challenged prevalent attitudes towards farmer capabilities. This became particularly evident when the film was screened to IP members, after the screening a national researcher stated ‘We have a lot to learn from community members. I have now come to realize that the farming community is capable of identifying problems and indicating solutions’. A member of the woreda administration said ‘Today I have come to realize that farmers can play a role in solving their problems by participating actively. It is advisable to keep involving farmers in discussions; they should participate in all stages, from planning and preparation to implementation’.  The PV process also seemed to have an empowering effect on the farmers involved in the PV training as well as those who attended the community level screening. PV enabled the participants to reflect on their current situation, to identify key issues and to clearly articulate their views to decision makers and members of the wider community. It is hoped that this will influence their ability to participate more actively in future planning and implementation processes. Unfortunately, the PV process did not involve farmers from the IP intervention sites because they were selected after the training had occurred. Greater engagement between IP members and community members in the intervention sites will be focused on in ongoing community engagement work. There are also plans to bring together community members involved in the PV process with those participating in the pilot interventions to discuss IP activities. This will hopefully lead to a greater sense of ownership and active engagement with the process.  Although some changes in attitude have been observed since the IP film screening, the extent to which the attitudes of IP members have really changed is uncertain. This will be monitored over time to assess the longer term impact of the PV work by tracking the degree to which community concerns are incorporated into the design of the pilot interventions. A principal constraint on the work is the amount of time needed to develop trust and a common understanding with the various stakeholders in order to bring meaningful change. This is part of a long term process in which continuous engagement is required through practical training and capacity building to further foster participatory approaches. However, it is clear that PV has been a useful first step towards changing attitudes, redressing power imbalances and increasing community participation within the platform. |
| Lessons | We learned a number of lessons through this participatory video project:   * **Building social capital and countering research fatigue**. The Fogera site has been the subject of extensive research in recent years and communities are increasingly reluctant to devote time to interacting with researchers when they see limited gains from their expenditure of time. Use of tools such as PV which are fun to use and which foster self-expression and self-esteem can help to counter research fatigue and build positive relationships with local communities. * **PV can be demanding of time and resources.** Production of the film required the full time engagement of a professional consultant for 10 days plus additional time from NBDC staff. Such deep engagement of professionals makes scaling of PV approaches difficult due to resource constraints. However, as we have yet to conduct further screenings of the film at higher level we are not yet in a position to judge whether the effort was justified. This will need to wait until we can assess the longer term impact on attitudes regarding participatory planning and implementation with higher level stakeholders. * **Messages can be lost in technical admiration.** Films produced by local communities are extremely engaging. We found that local innovation platform members were astonished at the competencies of local farmers in producing the film and at their ability to articulate complex issues with clarity. There is a danger that the core messages may be overwhelmed by short term admiration for this technical skill. Further screenings along with facilitated discussions may be needed to allow the core issues to come to the fore. * **Changing attitudes and increasing community participation is a long term process.** Although some changes in attitude have already been observed it is important to stress that any meaningful change will take time, and may not be possible within the timeframe of the project.   **Next steps.** We plan further screenings of the film at national level and will document the impact of the film and its usefulness in catalyzing change in approaches to rainwater management among higher level stakeholders. We are also experimenting with the use of less resource demanding methods of bringing community voice into innovation platforms including the use of photo stories.  The participatory video can be seen here:  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SSOm1hsCsE |
| **Describe the issues that have facilitated the success aspects of this story?** |
| **What has exacerbated the aspects of this story that have not gone well?** |
| Process | **Why and how was this story selected?**  This story was selected because it illustrates efforts that have been made to involve community members in the local level IP process using innovative approaches. Lack of community representation, and negative perceptions towards farmers on the part of higher level stakeholders, are significant issues that have emerged from the IP work to date. Finding ways to address these issues will be critical to the success of the IP activities on the ground, and will generate valuable lessons for future processes. |

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| **Project** | **NBDC 3** |
| **Title** | **Happy people-happy strategies** |
| **Author(s)** | **Catherine Pfeifer, An Notenbaert** |
| **Domain** |  |
| **Story** | N3 developed a database of about 90 rainwater management practices. Numerous challenges were following on from there: how to present the database, how to validate this database, how to prioritize the practices and how to combine the different practices into strategies. In order to face these challenges and make the whole database more “digestible” for stakeholders we decided to develop a game to present the database at the CPWF meeting in South Africa, and to test the game at the NBDC stakeholder meeting in Bahir Dar in May 2011. The test game with stakeholders did not really allow validating the database comprehensively, but it turned out to be an amazing tool to start discussions about combination of practices with people of very different backgrounds.  From this experience the game has been adjusted to be played with communities and students. The game with communities was used to investigate optimal watershed management from the community perspective. It has been played in 4 watersheds, both with women and men groups.  The gained information is subsequently used to validate N3 suitability map, as well as to complement the N3/N2 farm household survey data with qualitative data. The game with students has been adjusted to maximize knowledge sharing between participants. Meta Meta, a consultant in water issues in Ethiopia, has asked us to play the game with the participants of their training for water practitioners in Mekele.  Feedbacks from all the games have been very positive, with people enjoying, sharing and learning at the same times.  Also the other CGIAR projects are showing their interest in the game. Therefore, in order to make the game more accessible, we plan to make it available on an interactive wiki, where people who used the game can report back. |
| **Lessons** | **List the lessons here**  1.games is an amazing way to involve people, to share knowledge (stakeholders learn from scientists, and scientist learn from stakeholders, students learn from each other)  2.having several enthusiastic people can make things happen even if they are not explicitly in any work plan  3.it is a tool that can promote our work beyond our network  4.  5. |
| **Describe the issues that have facilitated the success aspects of this story?**  When the idea of a game emerged, many people were enthusiastic about it, the positive feedbacks and the time the especially KMIS put into the game, allowed to make it happen. |
| **What has exacerbated the aspects of this story that have not gone well?**  Some of the games with the communities were sometimes difficult especially with women. The game has been further adjusted to fit the particular need women. |
| **Process** | **Why and how was this story selected?** |

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| **Project** | **NBDC 3** |
| **Title** | **Development trajectories and hotspots of degradation** |
| **Author(s)** | **Lisa-Maria Rebelo** |
| **Domain** |  |
| **Story** | Ethiopia has adopted three successive poverty reduction programs over the past 12 years with a focus on the intensification and commercialization of agriculture. Each of these policies have had an effect on the land use and temporal dynamics of land cover and land use change within the Blue Nile Basin (BNB). There are numerous studies looking at changes in land cover, land use and degradation within individual watersheds of the Blue Nile Basin. However, to our knowledge, none exist that take a step back and look at the trends at the basin scale, or which combine biophysical and socio-economic factors to explain the trajectories of change and development which have occurred across the basin over the past 10-15 years. Patterns of land use and land cover are determined by biophysical and social variables interacting in space and time; as land use transitions are often characterized by different development pathways in different locations, an analysis of the spatial determinants of the various trajectories is essential for effective land use planning and the development of appropriate land related policies.  Under the N3 project, research is being undertaken to characterize the development trajectories within the BNB. We are analysing land use/cover changes (as well as dynamic processes such as biomass production, erosion and fire) and the factors driving land change processes over the past 10 years, which will allow us to identify hotspots and directions of change. These will subsequently be used as an input to the extrapolation domains for rainwater management interventions under the assertion that effective targeting of interventions at the at basin scale, an understanding of past changes and hotspots of change is essential.  An interesting development in the work has emerged in relation to the occurrence of fire and burning due to agriculture within the Blue Nile. This was raised as an issue again and again by farmers and national partners in Ethiopia. While farmers and government agencies advocate burning as a way of increasing soil fertility, in the long term the effect is likely to be a decrease in soil fertility, due to modification of run-off and infiltration processes. Under N3 an analysis of fire was conducted for the basin – daily fire extent was mapped between 2000 and 2011, and a very clear pattern emerged, with large areas burning at the same time every year. The results are being used by N4 in the SWAT modeling, as fire will modify run-off and infiltration processes. Colleagues from the Volta Basin have seen the results, and following discussions we have produced the same fire data for the Volta. These are being using within V4 to analyze the impact of frequent burning and flood severity, and to provide an understanding of the extent to which burning is practiced. |
| **Lessons** | **List the lessons here**  1.Information on past changes in land use and land cover are essential to properly understand the current conditions in the basin  2. For effective targeting of interventions at the at basin scale, an understanding of past changes and hotspots of change is essential  3. Fire is an important issue in the basin, contributing to both soil fertility and hydrology (through run-off and infiltration processes)  4. Fire is also an important cross cutting basin issue |
| **Describe the issues that have facilitated the success aspects of this story?**  Identifying cross basin issues (fire) and developing cross basin research between BDCs (Nile and Volta), collaborating with other CG centres working in the Nile and on other N projects (ICRAF and IFPRI). |
| **What has exacerbated the aspects of this story that have not gone well?** |
| **Process** | **Why and how was this story selected?**  Fire and burning within the basin was not initially planned as a component of the work on development trajectories, but was raised time and time again in discussions with stakeholders and has emerged as an important issue through the N2 innovation platforms. N3 therefore decided to adjust the work on development trajectories to incorporate a detailed analysis of the fire regimes of the basin. The research on fire has just been completed for the Nile and Volta and the results are extremely enlightening. These are receiving increasing interest and attention and agricultural burning is emerging as an important issue not only with the respective BDCs but within other basin research projects. |

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| **Project** | **NBDC 3** |
| **Title** | **The magic of mapping** |
| **Author(s)** | **Catherine Pfeifer, An Notenbaert** |
| **Domain** |  |
| **Story** | Through our previous training efforts in collaboration with local partners, basic GIS skills have already started spreading throughout the Nile Basin. This enables stakeholders to incorporate spatial data and simple analysis into the design, planning and assessment of rainwater management. A full assessment of suitability, including factors influencing adoption and assessing strategies at landscape level, however, requires quite advanced analysis skills. Typically these are done by specialists using expensive commercial GIS packages. N3 has therefore developed an open source GIS tool, the Nile-Goblet tool, which allows doing suitability mapping for the Blue Nile basin without any prior GIS knowledge.  The registrations for the training sessions offered in Addis and in Gondar show that there is broad interest in the tool. Beyond our N3 partners we have also invited participants from ministries, NGOs and other governmental institutes in order to spread the tool widely.  Also the technology group of the national innovation platform thinks that understanding where the technologies fit is crucial for implementing them on the ground. Therefore, the learning event of the platform will be about using the Nile Goblet tool.  In addition, we have been approached by ICARDA with the request to adjust the tool for higher resolution allowing to map detailed suitability maps for micro-watershed. The collaboration with ICARDA will allow us to access detailed input map to test the tool at different scale.  Finally, other projects (Africa Rising) have shown interests to adjust the tool for their own needs. |
| **Lessons** | **List the lessons here**  1.Easy GIS is something that people are waiting for  2.  3.  4.  5. |
| **Describe the issues that have facilitated the success aspects of this story?**  Collaboration with our partners has helped us to define the needs, and has also led to collaborations (ICARDA) we were not planning to have but are beneficial for everyone. |
| **What has exacerbated the aspects of this story that have not gone well?** |
| **Process** | **Why and how was this story selected?** |

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| Project | NBDC N5 |
| Title | Online peer assists to keep communication and integration front and centre |
| Author(s) | Ewen Le Borgne |
| Domain | Communication |
| Story | In early 2012, in discussion with Michael Victor and Peter Ballantyne we decided to launch online peer-assists to bring all CPWF communication people in touch with each other and to provide much needed and appreciated peer support, as we all agreed among communication specialists that we were struggling around similar issues and would benefit from working together on these, as well as to better understand activities in the CPWF as a whole. This turned out to be a great mechanism for CPWF but also for the NBDC to (continue to) put due emphasis on communication.  Before the online peer assists, there was rather little ongoing exchange among communicators in the Challenge Programme for Water and Food, except communications between Peter Ballantyne and Michael Victor and odd face-to-face events involving a wider group of communicators, such as the International Forums for Water and Food, and occasional Yammer messages preceding or directly following face-to-face contact. During the third of these forums, communicators from all basins were again very happy to see and work with each other. But the risk of losing that energy of being together was looming again.  In order to keep the momentum, we agreed to start a series of online peer assists around the broad topic of ‘How to develop more engaging communication processes leading to more engaging scientific research results?’. These meetings would last 1.5 hours and would be facilitated by Ewen Le Borgne (as part of a support contract provided to the CPWF secretariat by ILRI knowledge management and information services).  Peer assists are a facilitation mechanism that require one person to present a concrete case of problem they are facing. All other participants first listen carefully, then ask for clarification questions and then provide, one by one, their suggestions for dealing with the problem at hand. At the end, the peer assistee explains what recommendations s/he will apply. Later on, s/he shares feedback with the group about the results garnered. In the CPWF we used an online version of this method, using Skype to chat verbally and [MeetingWords](http://meetingwords.com/) to document the conversation as it happens, live.  Six peer assists have been held since the beginning of the 2012, showcasing concrete problems from various basins:   * Nile Basin Innovation Platforms: Why IP’s and how can we link the local with the national? * Engaging Ganges scientists in the communication work * Yammer, a conversation space for 4-5 people only? (Andes case) * Documenting processes, why bother? (*Another Nile case*) * CPWF global website * How to convey and communicate research through participatory video? (Volta case)   The peer assists have been much appreciated by all participants for the practical tips provided, useful conceptual references brought in and for the ongoing networking which has cemented strong relationships among communication specialists across the CPWF. The case of ‘documenting processes’ for instance put much emphasis on this area of work between communication and M&E, helped unearth useful resources and provide simple entry points to doing it in all basins. In the case of the CPWF global website, the secretariat team found lots of useful advice to collect stories from the basins without having to duplicate work or steal ownership/traffic from the individual basin channels.  Peer assists have progressively involved more people, not directly related to CPWF work – as they heard about it on the Yammer network ‘Comms for uptake’ where the peer assists were promoted, announced and documented. Occasionally these peer assists brought together scientists such as Beth Cullen for the Innovation Platforms case or Karen Greenough about documenting processes. These peer assists have also paved the way for a series of (online) learning and documentation meetings which started in August (including basin leaders and scientists from various basins). In the recent workshop on communication and knowledge management for CRPs, online peer assists were again discussed as one of the mechanisms that could be used to enhance relations between science and communication and connections across CRPs.  **What is remarkable or interesting about these online peer assists?**  On top of the benefits for associated communication specialists, these peer assists have been a great way to connect communication and research more strongly, in relation with both research outputs and work processes. In the case of the IP discussion, the peer assist has been the basis of an idea to document IPs more widely across the CPWF, to support Beth and the NBDC team in this from a program perspective.  For the NBDC, these peer assists have been a great way to showcase some of the work that is going on in the Basin and to strengthen the approach to communication, incorporating feedback from other CPWF members and extending the reach of NBDC work through global CPWF outlets (newsletter, website etc.).  The regular attention to communication that these peer assists stimulated also helped communication keep on playing a relatively strong role in NBDC, leading to a couple of NBDC meetings about it and the development of a 5-pager laying out communication priorities for the end of the program, which is one of the sources for NBDC’s learning and documentation plans.  **What constraints remain**  The biggest challenge is to ensure the presence of scientists in these peer assists, as they are time-starved and do not necessarily prioritize this type of work.  The cases also need to be as practical and clear as possible to generate useful results, otherwise they end up being very vague discussions.  Some cases presented are complex – innovation platforms are difficult to grasp for their own participants for instance, documenting processes is not a straightforward and clearly identified ‘comms’ or M&E task – and take time to take shape so it is unclear how each basin team has really taken advantage of the peer assists to inform planning and activities.  Technically, the internet connection is not always reliable although the MeetingWords pad has been a great help in ensuring everyone can follow the conversation even if they drop out.   Supporting documentation  <http://infoilri.wordpress.com/2012/09/06/online-peer-assists-learning-about-concrete-solutions-and-better-questions-for-water-and-land-management-researchers/> |
| Lessons | **List the lessons here**  1. Concrete problems discussed regularly among a group are a great way to generate solutions and develop social capital among group members  2. Attention to communication increases with regular participation and leads to stronger integration across all basins  3. It remains difficult to engage scientists in what might not seem a directly useful / productive activity  4. The mechanism of peer assist has great potential for complex programs that need strong communication, cooperation and/or coordination  5. Having a support contract ensured these meetings could be facilitated and documented properly |
| **Describe the issues that have facilitated the success aspects of this story?**  Initial face-to-face contact and trust building among the starting group. Online facilitation experience to run the events. Good choice of technologies to not rely too heavily on Skype). Dissemination in appropriate channels to stimulate interest from others. |
| **What has exacerbated the aspects of this story that have not gone well?**  Technology issues, lack of experience in presenting concrete problems, lack of seniority of comms people to attract scientific audiences. |
| Process | **Why and how was this story selected?**  As indicated in the first paragraph above, peer assists have been a crucial mechanism to emphasize communication and documentation across CPWF, strengthen linkages across basins and ensure better integration of communication with M&E and other areas of CPWF work such as innovation platforms. This story is potentially important also to emphasize a mechanism that we might wish to expand in other areas of ILRI work or into the ‘Water Land and Ecosystems’ research program. |

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| Project | NBDC N5 |
| Title | Thematic areas as incentives for survival of platforms |
| Author(s) | Kees Swaans; Tilahun Amede |
| Domain | Change of approach (the way we interact with our partners to generate evidence for policy advocacy and influence for the national platform and beyond) |
| Story | The Challenge Program for Water and Food (CPWF) jointly identified ‘Rainwater management strategies’ as a development challenge for the Nile BDC. Among the initial Nile BDC partners – mainly research organizations and universities – there were differing definitions about rainwater management, but there was consensus that it mainly revolved around land and water management and that the involvement of other actors was necessary to have an impact on development. Hence, a National platform was established in April 2011 to create a forum for improved interaction and communication in the area of land and water management, with a focus on rainwater at landscape scales. It was strongly supported by a wide range of organizations, not the least by the Ministry of Agriculture.  Stakeholders with a stake in natural resource management, representing the government, research, NGO/CBOs, private sector, and donors, became members of the platform. However, the diversity in actors in terms of type, scope of operation and competencies was also represented in their views on landscape management and variable priorities. These interests include erosion management, drought management, revegetation of landscapes, crop-livestock systems, irrigation, soil and water conservation, climate change, land tenure policies etc. The original narrow concept held by research of strategies directly related to management of rainwater was challenged. Rain water management depends on many interlinked processes and management strategies related to water, land, and natural resource management. We were forced to broaden the concept and adapt a holistic system perspective, but at the same time it was important to keep members engaged and to entertain them for the common good. This has been played out in two ways: a) through the establishment of thematic working groups, and b) through creating workshop forums, which entertains topics of interest in rotation as they emerge.  Thematic working groups were created with support of the steering committee, reflecting major interest groups. Terms of Reference were developed and responsibilities shared. While the steering committee remains responsible for the overall direction and functioning of the national platform, the thematic working groups are expected to generate evidence for policy advocacy and influence for the national platform and beyond. Four groups were established - around 1) technological innovation, 2) institutional innovation, 3) policy support, and 4) climate change and resilience. Key persons representing government, university or NGOs were asked to chair a core group of different types of organizations (i.e. government, universities/research, NGOS, etc.), to identify peers to join the core group and to develop an action agenda. Groups are in essence fluid, although each working group has some core members to drive their activities.  In June and July of 2012, meetings were organised with the core teams of the Thematic Working Groups to develop an action agenda based on commonly identified key problematic areas or challenges. The ideas and planned activities were presented during the national platform meeting held in July for feedback, while giving members the opportunity to express in which groups they are interested. The thematic working groups will organize at least two learning events a year – in between the national platform meetings – to identify lessons learned, as well as key constraints and opportunities. Outcomes of these events will be published in communiqués, and results will be fed back into the national platform.  In addition to the thematic working groups, we have facilitated forums to entertain particular topics of interest within the broader grouping of thematic groups. For instance, the third national platform in July 2012 was organized in collaboration with ICRAF and dealt with revegetation of landscapes, which is a cross cutting thematic area across the groups. This arrangement is expected to link initiatives, reduce duplication of efforts, reduce number of workshops and facilitate joint action around the challenge of NRM, from different angles (trees, water, soils, institutions). We were setting examples on how a single platform could be used to capitalise on what is discussed in earlier meetings, fill critical gaps and suggest comprehensive strategies. Other institutions like FAO have also used the platform for their final meeting on agricultural water solutions.  **What is remarkable or interesting about this?**   * The emergence of thematic working groups and workshop forums, not planned, as a response to demand of national platform members to accommodate the needs of various disciplines * The narrow understanding research had on ‘rainwater management systems’ – i.e. mainly dealing the eth management of rain water as such – and the need to broaden this concept for the interest of development partners from various decisiplines * The change in institutional dynamics over time, from university dominated to NGO/government dominated forum * How it became an incentive to hold the platform members together; other platforms die even before they start; unless huge money is pumped into it. * The interest institutions show to use the platform as it brings the various actors and desciplines together; became a glue * The future role; how it could be exploited to serve as a knowledge and evidence generating tool   **What constraints remain**   * Incentives to sustain it with the available resources; need for resources for facilitation * Getting national champions to keep it going after NBDC * Institutionalization of the platform as an action wing of the ministry |
| Lessons | **List the lessons here**   1. Thematic working groups and workshop forum provide a mechanism for actors to identify themselves with the overall goals and objectives of a national platform. The diversification into themes makes it easier for actors to align themselves with specific goals, concrete activities, and tangible outputs, with the platform serving as a mechanism for advocacy and support at the broader national level. 2. It remains a challenge to find a balance between involving key persons to lead the groups with an overall overview of the thematic area and the position and authority to mobilize others and technical people who have the time to drive the activities. 3. The broadening of topics beyond rainwater also creates a challenge to make sure that we are staying focussed 4. The groups need initial support in terms of facilitation, logistics, communications, which requires institutional backing. 5. Communication between members of the thematic working groups is a challenge as they may be dispersed over the country, from different type of organizations, and capacity. |
| **Describe the issues that have facilitated the success aspects of this story?**   1. Support from steering group members, which made it possible to involve key people 2. Themes closely related to topics of NBDC, which made buy in from staff member of NBDC, as well as support staff an important factor. |
| **What has exacerbated the aspects of this story that have not gone well?**   1. Difficult to maintain momentum, with limited resources to support and backstop this process. 2. In some groups diversity in opinions of what needs to be done to address identified issues; needs good facilitation |
| Process | **Why and how was this story selected?** |